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Sickle Cell Trait Causes Internal Disorders in Flight

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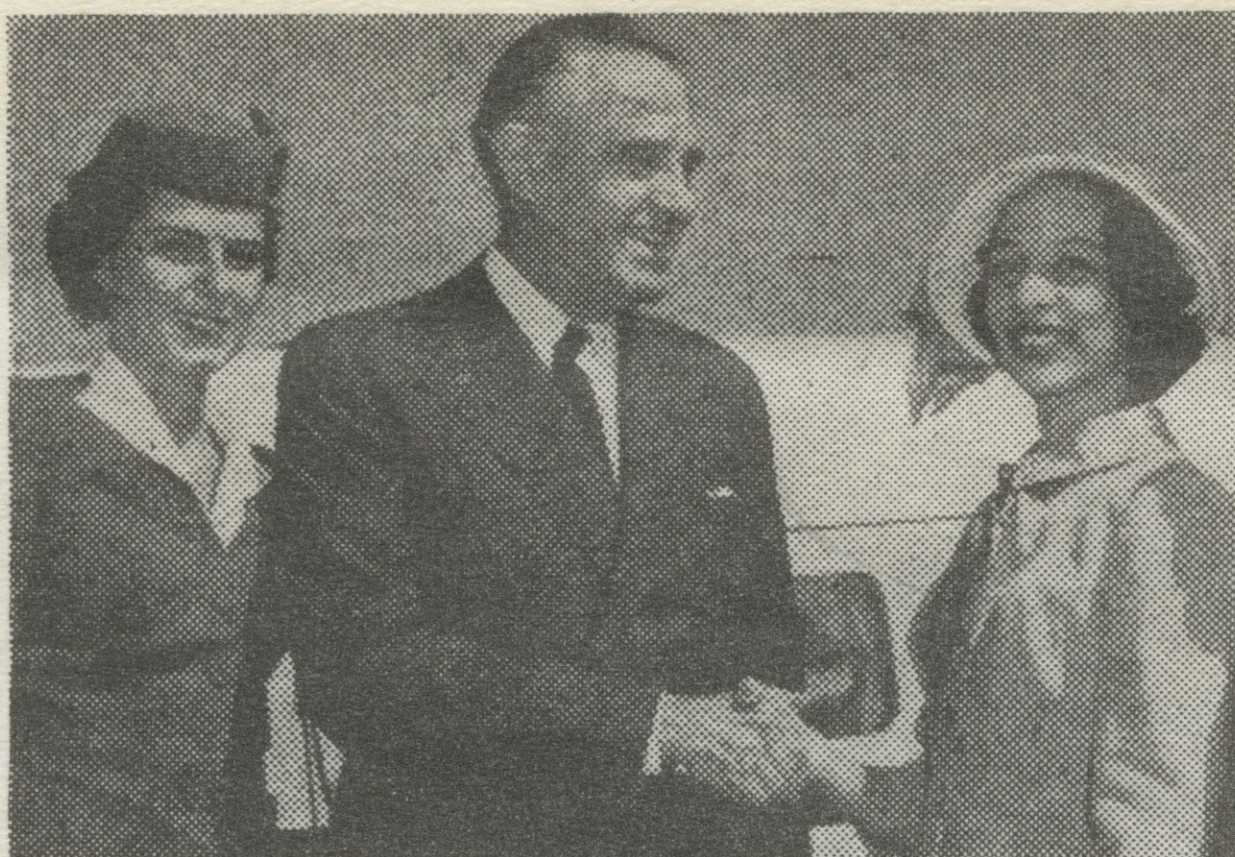
THE DISEASE THAT STOPS NEGROES FROM FLYING

SICKLE CELL TRAIT CAUSES

As the first Negro enrolled at Trans World Airlines' stewardess school in Kansas City last month, petite New Yorker Margaret Grant was not too different from her four white roommates. Like them, the 21-year-old Hunter College graduate had mentally cataloged TWA's nine different airplane types, memorized code names of cities along its air routes, became familiar with galley operations aloft. Despite her studiousness, however, Margaret did not graduate with her class last week. She was dropped on the ninth day of training when doctors discovered she had inherited a blood disorder which made flying dangerous to her health. The disorder: sickle cell trait.

Margaret, one of an estimated 1,520,000 U. S. Negroes (eight per cent) who are poor flying risks because of the abnormal trait discovered in 1910, had always been healthy although "slightly on the thin side." And while she will probably never suffer from her blood disorder, it has made her especially selective about a future husband. If his body also harbors hemoglobin S, the

gene for sickle cell trait, then 25 per cent of their children may be born with a more serious blood malady dubbed sickle cell anemia. Their bodies, like those of about 80,000 other Negroes, will be highly



Miss Grant was congratulated by N. Y. Gov. Harriman before training stint.

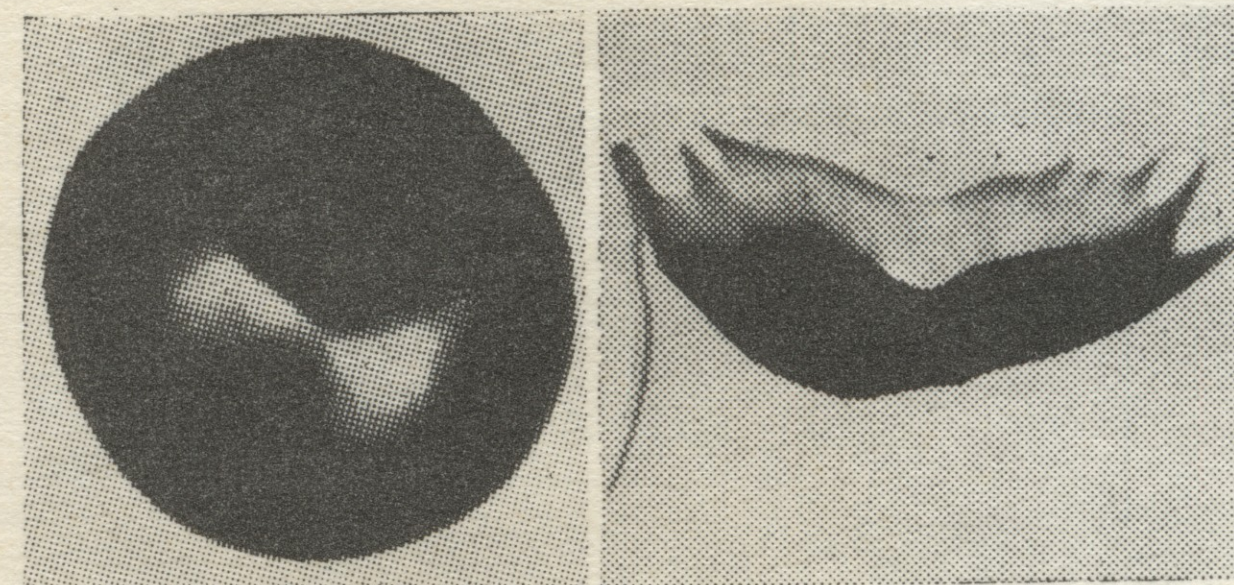
INTERNAL DISORDERS IN FLIGHT

receptive to jaundice, pneumonia and tuberculosis, may suffer from leg ulcers, bone joint and muscle pains. They may even die before they reach age 30. For death is the only known "cure" for sickle cell anemia. Said Margaret, grimly aware that her husband-to-be will have to be almost blood-pure: "He'll have to take a sickle cell test."

How can an unsuspecting person know he has sickle cell trait? The answer: through tests. These tests have been routinely administered for 12 years at Chicago's Michael Reese Hospital.

"You can't tell people not to have children," says famed hematologist Dr. Aaron Josephson. "But we feel we should warn couples with sickle cell trait of possible dangers to their children."

Hospital researchers siphon a drop of blood from patients, slide it under a microscope, look for red blood cells that normally resemble a batch of poker chips. After they add a special chemical, however, odds are 25-2 the cells will change into bizarre, elongated, crescent shapes indicating the presence of hemoglobin S. In high altitude flying a lack of oxygen in the bloodstream triggers the same sickling reaction, "piles up" misshapen sickle cells in the small capillaries of such organs as the spleen and liver, causes them to swell and become irritated.



Electron microscope shows cell (l.) with sickling gene; forms weird shape (r.).